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Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013

Conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality (A/66/680), which was submitted pursuant to section XIV of General Assembly resolution 65/259. During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, as well as with representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), who provided additional information and clarification.

2. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in paragraphs 21 and 22 of his report on the revised security management framework and revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011 under section 5, Peacekeeping operations, related to a strengthened and unified security management system for the United Nations (A/65/320 and Corr.1), the Secretary-General provided information on the United Nations security management system guidelines for acceptable risk, which were approved by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination in April 2009. The guidelines were developed in support of the "how to stay" approach and were intended to describe how the Organization could accept higher levels of residual risk when there was a need to implement vital programmes. In his report on the conclusions of the High-level Working Group, the Secretary-General states that field testing of the guidelines had identified the need for greater clarity in the security risk management model with respect to determining programme criticality, in particular the need for clear definitions and the establishment of a clear framework for decision-making (A/66/680, para. 1).

3. Accordingly, as indicated in paragraph 1 of the report of the Secretary-General on the conclusions of the High-level Working Group (A/66/680), in June 2010 the High-level Committee on Management of the Chief Executives Board established the Working Group on Programme Criticality, chaired by UNICEF. The Working Group was tasked with defining four levels of programme criticality (see para. 6

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below) and developing a common framework for informing decision-making within the guidelines for acceptable risk. As indicated in paragraph 2 of the report, the Working Group was composed of representatives of the Chief Executives Board with large field operations, namely, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Safety and Security.

4. The report of the Secretary-General provides information on the work undertaken to date to develop a programme criticality framework. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 4 that the report constitutes an interim update on the activities of the Working Group and does not contain its final conclusions, which have yet to be reached and will not be available until after the Group has reported to the High-level Committee on Management in 2013.

5. In paragraphs 7 and 8 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, since its formation, the Working Group has developed a programme criticality framework and a proposed implementation plan. The framework, which was developed through extensive consultations at the Headquarters and field levels, including field testing, includes a methodology and a supporting electronic tool for informed decision-making. The framework will be used to determine the programme criticality level for specific activities within a given geographical location and time frame. The programme criticality level will then be used in the acceptable risk model to ensure that United Nations system personnel do not take unnecessary risks and that those who remain in-country work on the highest priority activities. According to the Secretary-General, the framework will also allow country-level programme managers to design programmes and activities taking into account predictable, known and acceptable risks.

6. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the four levels of programme criticality referred to in paragraph 3 above were as follows: PC1: very high residual risk; PC2: high residual risk; PC3: medium residual risk; and PC4: low residual risk. The Committee was also informed that the methodology and tool had been field tested by United Nations country teams in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Somalia. Participating agencies and United Nations offices had provided funding for their respective travel costs. The travel costs of the Department of Safety and Security had amounted to $32,800 and had been funded from the relevant section of the regular budget. The travel had been undertaken in conjunction with the Department's core business activities. The travel costs of the other participating agencies, funds and programmes (FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) had been met from extrabudgetary resources.

7. With regard to the involvement of Member States in determining the level of priority to be accorded to particular activities, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the programme criticality framework did not replace or amend the strategic priorities of the United Nations or its agencies, funds and programmes, which were decided upon and approved by the relevant legislative

bodies in accordance with established procedures and negotiated with hos Governments. The Committee was further informed that the need to establish the criticality of activities existed only where United Nations personnel were facing a medium security risk or higher, that is to say in a restricted number of situations. It was explained that the programme criticality framework was simply an instrument that had been developed to assist managers in the field to take time-sensitive decisions to prioritize programme activities in a specific location in response to changes in local security conditions. It was intended that programme criticality reviews would be undertaken at the country level by the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, in tandem with the country team, who would be responsible for ensuring that the host Government and Member States were informed of any actions taken. **The Advisory Committee emphasizes, in this regard, that the legislative authority and existing arrangements regarding oversight and accountability to the relevant legislative bodies should not be affected by the use of the programme criticality methodology and tool.**

8. As indicated in paragraph 9 of the report of the Secretary-General, in September 2011 the High-level Committee on Management approved the programme criticality methodology and tool as a framework for decision-making within the guidelines for acceptable risk, and recommended: (a) that it be rolled out in at least 12 countries by April 2013, and (b) that a consolidated progress report, including lessons learned and recommended adjustments to the methodology and tool, be submitted to it at its 2013 spring session, following a preliminary update at its autumn 2012 session. The Advisory Committee notes that, at the same time, the High-level Committee affirmed that the roll-out of the framework was the collective responsibility of the United Nations and would be undertaken by a Programme Criticality Coordination Team led by UNICEF and comprising members of the Development Operations Coordination Office, FAO, ILO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Safety and Security.

9. As for the resource requirements for the implementation of the programme criticality framework, the Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 9 of the report of the Secretary-General that the Programme Criticality Coordination Team has been tasked with developing a detailed funding proposal with an implementation plan and budget for the roll-out of relevant training. The Committee further notes from paragraph 11 of the report that, since field testing of the programme criticality framework had identified the need for a web-based tool, including a tutorial module, to support the provision of accelerated training to all country teams, priority would be given to mobilizing funds and expertise to develop that tool. According to the Secretary-General, resources will be sought from external donors to fund the development of the web-based tool and the 12-country roll-out.

10. Upon request, the Advisory Committee was provided with a preliminary version of the above-mentioned funding proposal. The indicative budget for phase one of the roll-out is currently estimated at $595,500, and includes funding for the development and testing of a programme criticality e-package, support for global management and coordination (to be provided by UNICEF) and a review of phase

one. A recovery cost equivalent to the normal recovery rate of 7 per cent for funds managed by UNICEF is also included. The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that, to date, the costs of participation in the Working Group meetings, which had been held at Headquarters with participation via teleconference for organizations away from Headquarters, had been minimal and absorbed by UNICEF. The Committee was further informed that, pending the receipt of voluntary contributions from donors, the humanitarian agencies and the Department of Safety and Security had each agreed to contribute $10,000 to initiate the roll-out. The contribution of the Department of Safety and Security would be met from its extrabudgetary resources.

11. It was explained to the Advisory Committee that the Programme Criticality Coordination Team had decided to seek extrabudgetary funding for phase one of the roll-out for reasons of efficiency and timeliness. The Committee notes, however, from paragraph 9 of the report of the Secretary-General that, should sufficient funding not be made available on time, the start date for the roll-out, as well as the scheduled training, would be delayed. **Since, as indicated in paragraph 4 above, work on the programme criticality framework is still at an interim stage, the Advisory Committee has no objection to the use of extrabudgetary resources to fund the initial 12-country roll-out.**

12. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly has, on several occasions, affirmed the importance of ensuring the safety and security of United Nations staff, operations and premises (most recently in resolution 65/259, sect. XIV, para. 6). The Committee considers that, in situations where lives may be at risk, and subject to the approval of the relevant governing bodies, the United Nations has an obligation to ensure that predictable funding is available for ongoing initiatives designed to protect its personnel. The Committee therefore recommends that, once the programme criticality framework is finalized, consideration be given to establishing appropriate cost-sharing arrangements for its full roll-out that reflect the system-wide nature of the initiative and are similar to other jointly financed activities in the United Nations system. The Committee also recommends that, in the interests of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, every effort be made to integrate programme criticality training into existing training programmes for United Nations staff.**

13. During its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee enquired about the relationship between the programme criticality framework and other initiatives designed to ensure that the United Nations could continue to operate in crisis situations, such as disaster recovery and business continuity planning, the organizational resilience management system and the soon-to-be-established common United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre. The Committee was informed that while the latter related to programme criticality insofar as it was also intended to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system around the world to continue to operate in the event of a crisis, the other initiatives focused primarily on establishing procedures and processes designed to preserve facilities and infrastructure at Headquarters so as to ensure that essential functions could continue to be performed in the event of an emergency or disaster. **The Advisory Committee encourages the Secretary-General to make every effort to ensure coherence and consistency between the programme criticality framework and other related initiatives.**

14. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General, bearing in mind its comments and recommendations in the paragraphs above and on the understanding that a further report, containing the final conclusions of the Working Group, will be submitted for consideration or approval once the Group has reported to the High-level Committee on Management in 2013. In this connection, the Committee recalls its earlier observation that, mindful of the need for accountability at all stages of the security risk management process, the work under way on the question of programme criticality should result in a common framework for decision-making that would indicate, inter alia, who was responsible for taking such decisions (A/65/575, para. 16).**